

Tube of the Month

TYPE “U” Plotron

Early vacuum tubes were often given names and not numbers. In 1913 the General Electric Company decided to give names to reflect the characteristics of the different types of tubes they were experimenting with. I guess it was fashionable to use Greek or Latin names, as was the practice when naming new species. Plotron was chosen for the triode tubes. Pleion in Greek is “more” and tron is an instrument. A plotron gives you more or it amplifies. GE produced many tubes during World War I for the military. Commercial use of transmitting tubes essentially didn’t exist. Near the end of the war, more powerful tubes were being made. A 50-watt version was especially useful and designated the “U” Plotron. It used a special bayonet socket. Today this size and shape of tube and the socket are still called “50 Watter”. Insulation between the four pins was made of mica and very weak.

About 1200 of these tubes was made for the Navy who gave it the designation CG-1144 and 200 for the Army who called it a VT-18. The Navy used these tubes in their seaplane transmitters. This tube was a natural for commercial and amateur radio equipment, so after the war ended, GE came out with an improved tube designated the UV203 and was a big hit with hams who could afford it. For the next 30 years the 50 watter was modified and improved. The construction of the 203 limited its upper frequency, but this shape of tube is still very popular in audio as in the 211 and 845 types.

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